

# **DISCOVER THE FUTURE:**

**Move Beyond The Past**

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January 4, 2015

**Congregational reading: Mark 16:1-7**

**Sermon in a sentence: The past is past and cannot be changed, so we will look to the future.**

**Scriptures: Mark 16:1-7; John 12:24; Prov. 24:15-16; Phil. 3:12-16; Matt. 26:31-35,69-75**

The start of each year is always significant as we come to a time of stocktaking, renewal, resolve, new endeavors, new vision and new hope. God has created these cycles and seasons into the mystery of life and we can be truly thankful for this.

Those who determined the order of months in our calendar and decided which would be first and last have designated January as the first month in our year. In light of the things we have just considered about 'newness', does it not seem strange to be speaking of this at the beginning of the deadest time of the year? January comes just 11 days after the winter solstice, the beginning of winter, when most of us run and hide from cold winds, low temperatures, long nights and short days. This is the time that we are furthest away from the sun, nature's source of light, heat and life. This is the time when people get depressed because of lack of light and a deficiency of Vitamin D. And yet, this is the start of another year, representing all things NEW! Why not make April 1<sup>st</sup> New Year's Day, at the beginning of the Spring season? (Even the name "Spring" seems to take us forward to a better place.)

There may well be a lesson for us in this after all. Just because something *looks* dead, that does not mean it *is* dead. By way of example, Jesus gave a little parable.

John 12:24 NKJV “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain.”

In other words, our hopes, dreams and plans may seem dead, buried and trampled into the ground, and we may have absolutely no vision of future success. But God has put certain factors to work on our behalf, even though we may have no personal strength remaining. He knows how to use the dirt, the water, the planting (burial) – even the trampling to bring about an abundance of new life that would have been impossible otherwise. *This* is how seeds were designed to grow and multiply!

So the wisdom of beginning a new year when everything *seems* to be dead, is to force us to realize that we are still alive and have the ability to go forward.

Let us look at this from another angle. There are many things we can refer to if we choose to catalogue our faults and failures, but there is a particular biblical response that the wise man Solomon laid out for us. He said:

Prov. 24:15-16 NRSV Do not lie in wait like an outlaw against the home of the righteous; do no violence to the place where the righteous live; <sup>16</sup> for **though they fall seven times, they will rise again;** but the wicked are overthrown by calamity.

This is crucial. We *will* fall. We *will* fail. We *will* disappoint both God and ourselves with some of our nonsensical actions. But we *will* get back up and keep

moving forward!

The apostle Paul put it this way:

Phil. 3:12-16 NKJV Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. <sup>13</sup> Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. <sup>15</sup> Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. <sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, to *the degree* that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.

This message from the Lord keeps coming back to us, and the reason is very simple: we keep falling down and need encouragement to get back up. We keep looking behind at past failures instead of looking forward with new hope. We keep blaming ourselves for situations that have developed in our homes without making a plan for progress.

Here is a special word for parents. Unless you are a superhuman, super smart, superstar, super blessed individual, the chances are you have made mistakes as a parent. Most likely, you wish you had done many things better, and chances are you are blaming yourself for the way some of your children have turned out.

At a time like this, at the start of a new year, we need to undertake a thorough analysis of our situation and then

**take the following steps:**

- 1. Acknowledge our successes and failures to God and ourselves. There is no point in pretending; we need to acknowledge our situation for what it is. If things have gone very well and you can be justifiably proud of your godly children, thank God that you have had a hand in seeing their relationship with Him develop. If your children are wayward and not serving God, give God thanks that you had a hand in showing your children the path of righteousness in their tender, impressionable years. Time has not yet come to an end. They are still alive and there is still hope.**
- 2. If our analysis indicates that we have *not* consistently done the things we should have done in leading our children to Christ and being a good example of Christian living to them, we need to get together with them and give them our sincere apology. We cannot re-write the past, but it will be very helpful to us and to them to have us acknowledge our shortcomings and apologize.**
- 3. We must pray for our children! Whether or not they seem to be doing well, they need our consistent prayer. Sometimes we don't pray for them because they seem to be doing so well, and sometimes we don't pray because we are frustrated with them. Neither of these is the right response. We need to consistently bring our children before the Throne of Grace, asking God to take them in His hands to lead and guide them in His perfect will. We need to pray for God to strengthen them in their faith, to protect them from evil influences, to help them see the issues of life clearly and to help them prioritize their own personal time alone with God.**



**The apostle Peter was a man that knew failure intimately. He had a big mouth, was very impulsive, and told Jesus that he would never fall away or deny Him even if it meant his own death (Matt. 26:31-35). In his pride he lifted himself above his fellow disciples and said: “Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble”! But when ‘push came to shove’ as the saying goes, Peter could not even stand up to a couple of unarmed servant-girls and a group of bystanders who identified him as a follower of Jesus (Matt. 26:69-75). He denied Him three times and proved himself to be an abject failure.**

**Jesus died alone, with no support from Peter.**



**Yet on the day of His resurrection, Jesus specifically sent a message to Peter through an angel to say: ‘Head up to Galilee – I want to meet with you there’ (Mark 16:5-7)!**

**It is widely held that Peter was Mark's source for the information in his gospel, so it is not strange that the detail of the angel's message to Peter is not repeated in any other gospel. It really wouldn't have meant much to anyone else, but it meant the world to Peter! After all his bold words, followed by his great display of cowardice, he could never have imagined that Jesus would ever again want to have anything to do with him. But Jesus restored him and gave him a brand new start. And even though Jesus prophesied the horrible death Peter would face, from that moment on, he was a different man. He never forgot the love Jesus had shown to him.**



**And when it was his time to face the same fate in Rome, he said: "I am not worthy to be crucified like my Lord. Crucify me upside down."**

**Once again, let us remind ourselves of the fact that the Lord never abandons His children, even when we fall short of what we should be. He continues to encourage us to forget the past and embrace the glorious future He has in store for us.**

**We may well say: “Peter certainly didn’t have a “glorious future”. He ended up on a cross!” That is very true, but Peter died a happy man. Once, in the absence of personal danger, he denied Jesus three times. Now, in the presence of imminent death, he had the strength and courage to stand for Jesus and pay the ultimate price of love.**

**So let us get up out of the “Slough of Despond” John Bunyan wrote about and go forward into the great promise of the New Year, hand in hand with Jesus.**